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Letter dated 6 February 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Secretary-General recently issued his report on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2014/31).

The report, which was prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, is the first on the topic of children in the country. Syria has cooperated with the Special Representative to set out the truth and help save the country's children from the crimes of armed terrorist groups and the illegal sanctions imposed by certain States, which have affected every aspect of children's lives. Other States have exploited their suffering in order to elicit compassion from the international community and obtain funds intended for the children.

Against that backdrop, Syria has hosted two visits of the Special Representative and established a national committee on violations against children. As will be clear from the annexed report, it also provided the Special Representative with data and documented replies concerning human rights violations against children in Syria.

Unfortunately, none of that information found its way into the report. The Special Representative claims that she was unable to ascertain its veracity because the United Nations country task force had had limited access. However, the Syrian authorities did not receive any request from any of the United Nations offices in Damascus to visit a location in order to verify information provided by Syria. On the other hand, when she sets out information regarding the practices of armed terrorist groups, she describes them as either not verified or "not conducted as a policy or systematically".

The drafters of the report chose to borrow large sections from the report of the International Commission of Inquiry and other reports that are neither impartial nor based on the facts gathered on the ground. It is surprising that the report neglects to mention the catastrophic effect of the illegal and immoral sanctions on Syrian children.

The report also fails to refer to the steps taken by Syria to protect children's rights. Before the crisis, Syria was one of the most advanced countries in the region in terms of rights of the child. Since its outbreak, the Government has made colossal efforts in that regard that far outstrip those of other States, despite its greater

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burden. The Government has worked to assist and provide relief for children in Syria and abroad. As far as possible, it has sought to maintain a normal school year and to provide the free medical services that have been customary for decades, including vaccination campaigns against child polio — vaccinations that have been resisted by the terrorist groups, which brought the disease to Syria.

It is surprising that the report refuses to address the suffering of children in refugee camps in certain neighbouring States, including sexual exploitation. Some of those host States have attempted to obtain funds on behalf of the children, who continue to live in abject conditions. The report rejects recurring reports that armed terrorist groups have brought girls into Syria for so-called sexual jihad, even though officials from the concerned States have made statements acknowledging that barbaric practice.

It is worrying that the report seeks to create a hierarchy of armed terrorist groups and to exonerate some of them. Its approach is consistent with that of certain States, which recognize "moderate groups" in order to provide moral cover for foreign military support.

Unfortunately, despite Syria's efforts to arrange such a meeting, the competent United Nations officials did not meet with the national committee because they were constantly away from Syria. In a similar way, the office of the Special Representative avoided every attempt made by our Permanent Mission in New York to establish contact.

Syria has cooperated in good faith with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in order to enable Syria's children to return to a peaceful life. It expects her to show courage in setting out the facts and to inform Syria of the accusations made against it. Syria would then be able to discuss the accusations, give its side of the story and, if any of them prove accurate, find solutions. However, the Special Representative has failed to comply with her commitment to ensure accuracy and objectivity in her reports for the sake of Syrian children. Instead, she has chosen to defame Syria. Her lack of transparency and good faith casts doubt on her neutrality in addressing the suffering of Syrian children. It raises the question of whether Syria should cooperate with her in future, or continue on its chosen path to save the Syrian children.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mazen **Adi**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex to the letter dated 6 February 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Observations of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Syria

Damascus, 25 December 2013

Foreword concerning the methodology

It should be recalled that any cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict does not mean that we accept the designation of the events in Syria as a non-international armed conflict. Agreement was reached in that regard during Ms. Zerrougui's first visit to Syria.

Syria also rejects the designation of the Syrian Government as a party to the conflict. It believes that the real reason for the conflict is the presence of armed terrorist groups that are attacking the State and its sovereignty, territory and people. The Government is fulfilling its constitutional duty to protect the population from the crimes of these terrorist groups.

Although the report attributes acts and violations to the Syrian Government without offering the barest proof, the Syrian Government will nonetheless provide the Special Representative of the Secretary-General official, documented evidence and proof gathered by the State, which is the internationally recognized entity, to substantiate the violations committed by terrorist groups against the Syrian people, including against children.

In addition to such evidence and proof, which has been gathered in accordance with the legally mandated procedures, we have the statements issued by the terrorist groups themselves claiming responsibility for various terrorist operations, including bombings, mortar shell attacks and recruiting child soldiers, the clearest example of which is occurring in Raqqah governorate. These affirmations are the ultimate evidence of their responsibility.

The Syrian judiciary and its agencies and legal and technical departments, such as the judicial police and its ancillary units and the forensic medicine agency, have completed a number of investigations aimed at establishing the truth and identifying those responsible for the crimes that have been committed during the Syrian crisis. There are other such investigations that have not yet been completed. All investigations have been or are being conducted in accordance with due process standards.

The report is a compilation of information culled from other reports, including, in particular, the reports of the international commission of inquiry. Syria has conveyed its position regarding the reports of that biased and politicized commission. In addition, the report offers no facts or evidence. For example, it is alleged that countless children have been killed in the events. This is not a professional description but merely a reflection of what is conveyed by media outlets, which are seeking to spread misinformation for political purposes, not determine the truth.

Syria has also provided the Office of the Special Representative with much information that did not make its way into the report. This matter was discussed at length with the Special Representative when she visited Syria and when she met the Assistant Foreign Minister in September 2013 in New York. Syria stands ready to provide documents and complete proof in relation to the information that will be presented.

It was agreed with the Special Representative that the accusations levelled against Syria would be conveyed to it, so that Syria could look into them and, if they proved to be accurate, address the issue. The Special Representative did not adhere to this agreement, although the national committee concerned with documenting violations against children held a meeting with the relevant members of the United Nations country team. At that meeting, the committee affirmed its readiness to cooperate fully in that regard. The Syrian Government is still waiting to receive information concerning cooperation on this issue.

On the other hand, while she claims that the accusations against the Syrian Government are documented, she states that the majority of the information presented concerning the armed groups has not been verified. It should be noted that Syria did not receive clear assurances that the documented information it offered would find its way into the Special Representative's report.

The refusal of the Office of the Special Representative to share with Syria the report's recommendations, as is the practice with all reports concerning Member States, and its insistence on not revealing to Syria the accusations being made against and allow it the opportunity to rebut them, raises doubts about the transparency of the Special Representative's interactions with Syria.

These errors of methodology, some of which are contrary to what was agreed with the Special Representative, cause the Syrian Government to doubt the seriousness with which the United Nations addresses the accusations against Syria in its reports. It seems that the purpose of these reports is to defame Syria.

Observations regarding the introduction and the section on political and military developments

The report alleges that the crisis began when some children who had painted anti-State graffiti on walls in Dar'a were arrested and tortured. It further alleges that, in the beginning, the incidents were peaceful. Such a description of the events in Syria is naive and imprecise. Despite the many calls made by the Syrian authorities, no one who claimed that those children existed has been able to offer the name of a single child.

Moreover, the incidents were not peaceful at the start of the crisis, and there are documented reports that affirm the opposite. For example, there is the murder of General Abdu Khidr al-Tallawi, along with two of his children and his nephew, on 17 April 2011. In addition, arms were flowing to terrorist groups from the outset, as evidenced by the discovery that was made in the Umari mosque in Dar'a in March 2011, which coincided with the burning of the Civil Registry and the courthouse in that city. These incidents occurred at the beginning of the crisis. The purpose of the crisis is to destroy Syria, unravel its social fabric and dismantle its infrastructure. The report's conclusion that the Syrian State is responsible for most of the violations that occurred in 2011-2012 is therefore incorrect.

Violations of children's rights

I. Killing and maiming

The Syrian Ministry of the Interior maintains official records of the precise number of children who were killed by terrorist groups in the various governorates. The Government is prepared to discuss this documented information with the Special Representative.

The accusation that the Government targeted residential areas indiscriminately and with excessive force is utterly false. Fear for civilian lives was one of the most important reasons why the Government did not enter a number of areas. The terrorists proceeded to take entire neighbourhoods and used them as human shields. One such example is the Adra al-'Ummaliyah, into which the Syrian Arab Army has not yet entered in order to protect the lives of the families trapped inside it. Another example is the refusal of terrorists to free civilians trapped in a Homs neighbourhood and the many failed efforts to secure their release in May 2012.

It is surprising that the report attempts to lay the blame for the Hulah massacre, as well as for the other mass killings that were committed by terrorist groups, on the Syrian Government, even though those massacres were clearly timed to coincide with Security Council or Human Rights Council meetings, thereby offering fodder for Syria's enemies and their pronouncements and campaigns against Syria. Moreover, international investigations did not determine that the Syrian Government committed the Hulah massacre. There is evidence that it was terrorist groups that committed this heinous crime.

Following is a listing of some crimes against children that have been documented by the Syrian Government. The United Nations has not attempted to investigate any of those crimes.

- On 22 December 2013, six children, 16 teachers and one administrator were killed and scores of others were injured when terrorists detonated a car bomb in a school complex in the town of Umm al-Amad, which is located in the Homs countryside.
- On 9 December 2013, one child was killed by a mortar shell that was fired on the Dablan quarter of Homs city.
- On 6 December 2013, six children were injured, some seriously, by mortar shells that were fired on a number of residential neighbourhoods in Idlib city.
- On 2 December 2013, three children were killed by an explosive device in Hamah.
- On 27 November 2013, a girl was killed and many other civilians, including scores of children, were injured by mortar shells that were fired on civilian homes in Jaramana and the houses of police officers in Adra, Rif Dimashq.
- On 16 November 2013, a woman and her daughter were injured by mortar shells that were fired on two houses in Nisrin Street, Tadamun quarter.
- On 16 November 2013, a girl was injured by a mortar shell that was fired on the Kabbas quarter.
- On 10 November 2013, three children and their father were killed and 11 civilians, the majority of whom were women and children, were injured by

seven mortar shells that were fired on residential neighbourhoods in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq.

- On 9 November 2013, a woman and a child were killed and four other children were injured by two mortar shells that were fired on residential neighbourhoods in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq.
- On 9 November 2013, six children were killed in Aleppo and six civilians were killed by a rocket near the clinic in the residential quarter of Ashrafiyah.
- On 7 November 2013, five children and 12 other civilians were injured in Damascus and its surroundings by mortar shells that were fired on the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab, Qassa', Bab Tuma and Zablatani, Damascus.
- On 4 November 2013, three children, a man and a woman were killed and 37 others were severely injured when terrorists detonated a car bomb in the village of Thabitiyah, which is located in the eastern Homs countryside.
- On 31 October 2013, three children and 12 other persons were injured and two civilians were killed by mortar shells that were fired on residential neighbourhoods in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq.
- On 29 October 2013, three children and three other civilians were injured by four mortar shells that were fired on Jaramana, Rif Dimashq.
- On 28 October 2013, four children and their mother, along with four other civilians, were injured by mortar shells that were fired on the Qassa' and Kashkul quarters in Damascus.
- On 23 October 2013, three civilians were killed and 14 children, along with 12 other civilians, were injured by mortar shells that were fired on Nazihah Mundir and Fayiz Sa'id girls' schools in Jaramana.
- On 10 October 2013, three children and three other civilians were killed and 28 others were injured by rockets that were fired on Mustawda'at Street, Adhamiyah quarter, Aleppo.
- On 8 October 2013, a civilian was killed and seven others, including children, were injured by a rocket that was fired on civilian homes near Radwan mosque, Aleppo.
- On 5 October 2013, three children were killed and six civilians were injured by rockets that were fired on the towns of Nubul and Zahra, which are located in the Aleppo countryside.
- On 8 September 2013, a child was killed by an explosive device south of the Bilal roundabout in Hamah city.
- On 3 September 2013, some 68 children, of whom 60 were less than 10 years old, were massacred by terrorists in the Ladhiqiyah countryside.
- On 26 August 2013, two children were injured when five rockets were fired on the town of Barri Sharqi, which is located in the Hamah countryside.
- On 26 August 2013, two children were injured in Muhradah when a rocket was fired on their home.

- On 26 August 2013, a family consisting of three children and their parent. were injured by a terrorist bombing in Hamah city.
- On 23 August 2013, three children and a woman were injured by mortar shells that were fired on civilian homes in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq.
- On 21 August 2013, a mass grave was discovered in the Ladhiqiyah countryside that contained the bodies of civilians, including children and women, who had been killed by terrorists. The coroner said that the victims had died of multiple causes: some had had their throats cut, some had been stabbed with sharp implements and others had been shot.
- On 21 August 2013, one child was killed and eight others wounded by mortar shells that were fired on Damascus and the surrounding countryside, Homs and Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 19 August 2013, a girl was injured when a bus travelling along the Damascus-Homs international highway was attacked.
- On 16 August 2013, four children were injured in Damascus when terrorists fired a mortar shell on the Midan quarter. The attack also caused material damage.
- On 15 August 2013, two children who were not more than 13 years old were executed by terrorist groups in the Aleppo countryside.
- On 6 August 2013, three children and 15 other civilians were killed and 56 persons wounded, some critically, when car bombs exploded in Khidr Street and Suyuf Square.
- On 25 July 2013, 10 civilians, among whom were a number of children, were killed and scores of others were injured when terrorists detonated a bomb in Suyuf Square.
- On 12 July 2013, some children and other civilians were injured by a mortar shell that was fired on the Amarah quarter of Damascus.
- On 5 July 2013, three children were injured and a civilian was killed in Damascus by an explosive device in Mansur Street in the Maydan quarter of Damascus.
- On 2 July 2013, three children and seven other civilians were wounded, four critically, by a mortar shell that struck Nisrin Street in the residential quarter of Tadamun in Damascus.
- On 1 July 2013, three civilians were killed and 18 others injured when a car bomb exploded near the cultural centre in the town of Sabburah, which is located in the Hamah countryside. A number of women and children were among the victims.
- On 10 June 2013, in Aleppo, a child was executed in front of his parents by an armed group.
- On 11 June 2013, a number of children and women were injured when three mortar shells were fired on Mazin Dabbagh and Huda Sha'rawi schools in the Suryan al-Jadidah quarter of Aleppo.

- On 9 June 2013, three children were injured and two other civilians were killed when three mortar shells struck the Zablatani quarter of Damascus.
- On 30 May 2013, five civilians were killed and several others, among whom were women and children, were injured when a bomb exploded as it was being assembled in a bomb-making facility in the town of Kanakir, Rif Dimashq.
- On 15 May 2013, a girl, Mays Ali Halawah, and her parents were abducted in the village of Mas'udiyah, which is located in Qusayr district.
- On 22 April 2013, two girls were killed and five other children injured by mortar shells that were fired on 7 April School, Barzah.
- On 10 March 2013, two girls were killed and nine other children were injured when a bus belonging to a kindergarten was attacked in the Assad suburb of Harasta.
- On 10 February 2013, the only child of a couple was killed in a terrorist bombing in Jaramana.
- On 21 February 2013, some children were injured when terrorists detonated a bomb near their school in the Baramikah quarter of Damascus.
- On 5 December 2012, nine children and their teacher were killed and 20 other students were injured by mortar shells that were fired on a school in the Wafidin camp in Damascus.
- On 26 November 2011, a number of children were injured and four other civilians were injured by rockets that were fired on the Zahra, Nazihin and Wadi al-Dhahab quarters in Homs.
- On 1 November 2012, seven children and four other civilians were injured and one civilian was killed by rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells that were fired on the Sabil quarter of Homs.
- On 28 June 2012, two children were killed and two other children and a woman were seriously injured when a bomb exploded near the bakery in Idlib.
- On 28 June 2012, a child was shot dead by an armed group in Azmarin, Idlib.
- On 7 June 2012, a child was killed and four other children, all from the same family, were injured when an armed group opened fire along the Talfiq road in Haffah, Ladhiqiyah.
- On 27 April 2012, the children Bashar and Nisrin al-Faris were killed by terrorist groups that had accused their parents of being members of the Syrian Arab Army.
- On 27 April 2012, the children Bilal, Lina, Abir and Salam Izzuldin were killed and their siblings, Muhammad and Zinah, were injured by terrorist groups that had accused their parents of being members of the Syrian Arab Army.
- On 9 February 2012, some 16 civilians, among whom were women and children, were injured by mortar shells that struck the eastern quarters of Mu'addamiyah.

II. Sexual violence

The Syrian Government wishes to raise numerous questions concerning the credibility of the accusations levelled against Government actors regarding sexual violence against children. It questions whether those accusations are based on any genuine evidence, given that many of the parties involved in shedding Syrian blood have put forward politicized and unsubstantiated claims and accusations.

Syria underlines that crimes involving sexual violence have occurred when girls are married at a young age, without the conditions for marriage being met, for a short period of time. The practice, which goes under various names, violates Syrian law and international instruments on the rights of the child. It is well known that young women are being exploited in numerous ways on the basis of an array of fatwas from religious authorities, resulting in violations of children's rights in refugee camps.

The Syrian Government recalls the contents of its report on the fatwa concerning marriage jihad, which Syria had hoped would be reflected in the report of the Special Representative.

III. Imprisonment and torture

The report alleges that the Syrian Government has imprisoned children who had been recruited as soldiers by armed groups and inflicted various forms of torture on them in detention facilities. There is no truth in that allegation. However, the report of the Secretary-General has established that armed groups have recruited children, and that situation requires the competent Syrian Government authorities to take legal measures in respect of the child soldiers. As minors, the child soldiers are immediately sent to reform facilities, where care is provided in cooperation with civil society in the presence of specialized officers. Syria is committed to the contents of the recent law on child recruitment, which is binding on all parties and considers children as victims to be addressed under Syrian law on juveniles.

The information regarding places of detention in Syria and the treatment of juveniles therein is completely untrue. In any event, juveniles may not be detained; they are transferred to juvenile courts and, if convicted, sent to juvenile reform facilities.

A special procedure is in place for children recovered by the State from terrorist groups. Such children are placed in protection centres, rather than in detention centres. They are treated with kindness and respect while awaiting a fair trial.

It is worth recalling that under international law, freedom of opinion and expression are not absolute; their exercise is conditional on not harming public order or national security.

IV. Attacks on schools and hospitals

1. Attacks on schools

- On 22 December 2013, the complex of schools in Umm al-'Amad town, in the Homs countryside, was attacked by a car bomb, killing 2 children, 5 teachers and 1 administrator, injuring 13 civilians and causing substantial damage to the buildings. This information was provided by the Ministry of Education.

- On 21 December 2013, five civilians including two women and a child were killed when terrorists shelled the Burjiyat area in Hamdaniyah.
- On 16 December 2013, a girl and three other children were killed when terrorists shelled the Kahraba Primary School in the New City of Aleppo.
- On 2 December 2013, the French School in the Mazzah area of Damascus was shelled.
- On 20 November 2013, the Lubabah al-Hilaliyah and Umayyah schools in the Qassa'-Tahrir Square area of Damascus were shelled.
- On 19 November 2013, the Zayd Ibn al-Khattab School behind the Abbasiyyin Square was shelled, killing four teachers and one attendant.
- On 18 November 2013, the Ri'ayah School bus was attacked, killing one teacher and one warden.
- On 18 November 2013, the Nur School on Bab Tuma Square was shelled.
- On 17 November 2013, the Mahabbah School in the Bab Tuma area of Damascus was shelled.
- On 16 November 2013, the A'ishah al-Siddiqah Primary School in the Zahirah al-Qadimah area of Damascus was shelled. Four children were injured, and the school building and several cars around it were damaged.
- On 15 November 2013, the Mansur School in the Bab Tuma area of Damascus was shelled.
- On 11 November 2013, the Saint John of Damascus School in the Qassa' area was shelled, seriously injuring 11 boys and one girl.
- On 11 November 2013, a school bus belonging to the Risalah School in the Bab Sharqi area was shelled, killing four children.
- On 8 November 2013, the Shajarat al-Durr School in the Shaghur area was shelled, damaging the school building.
- On 24 October 2013, the Farabi School in the Bab al-Siba' area of Homs was hit by a rocket, which caused significant damage to the school building.
- On 23 October 2013, shells hit the Nazih Mundhir School and the Fa'iz Sa'id Primary School for Girls in the Rawdah area of Jaramana, Rif Dimashq governorate. Three people were killed and 26 others were injured, including 14 male pupils and one female pupil.
- On 26 August 2013, the Muhammad Hayshu School in Hamah governorate was hit by a rocket.
- On 18 July 2013, a school in the Dablan area of Homs, which was being used to house dozens of displaced families, was attacked, killing three civilians, injuring others and causing extensive damage to the building.
- On 16 July 2013, the Rashad Qusaybati School in Damascus was shelled.
- On 11 June 2013, three shells hit the Mazin Dabbagh and Huda al-Sha'rawi schools in the Suryan al-Jadidah area of Aleppo, injuring several children and women and causing extensive damage to the school buildings and facilities.

- On 3 May 2013, the Bassam Hamshu School in the Tijarah area of Damascus was shelled, damaging the building.
- On 22 April 2013, a shell hit the 7 April School in the Barzah area of Damascus, killing two girls and injuring eight civilians, five of them children.
- On 21 March 2013, a car bomb exploded in the Jamil Farhan School in Ahram Street, in the Wadi al-Dhahab area of Homs. Two people were killed and over 20 others were injured. The site of the blast also sustained extensive material damage.
- On 18 February 2013, two shells hit the Ma'unah al-Khassah School in the Qassa' area of Damascus, causing significant damage to the site and to cars that were parked in the area.
- On 5 February 2013, the Jurmuz School in the Hasakah countryside was attacked.
- On 27 January 2013, armed gangs attacked and vandalized the Sanamayn V School in Dar'a.
- On 9 January 2013, the Sharia School in the Darayya area of Damascus was retaken from armed gangs, which had vandalized the premises, destroying furniture and equipment. Numerous explosive devices which the terrorists had planted around the school to be detonated remotely were defused.
- On 5 December 2012, a school in the Wafidin camp, Rif Dimashq, was shelled, killing nine pupils and one female teacher and injuring 20 other pupils.

3,004 schools have been attacked and destroyed, and the Government has been forced to use 1,068 schools, or 20 per cent of the total number in Syria, as shelters. That situation is a result of killings and displacement, not to mention the fact that in certain towns, such as Dar'a, leaflets have been circulated urging the population not to send their children to school. A total of 1,929,400 children of school age have been unable to attend school. Sixty per cent of children in Syria have been admitted to formal education in safe areas, and 10 per cent attend informal classes in shelters. The remaining 30 per cent are outside the school system. The report makes no reference to the considerable efforts of the State to preserve continuity in education in spite of the clear targeting of schools.

2. Attacks on hospitals

The Special Representative does not reflect the reality of the armed groups' attacks on hospitals, a topic to which she makes only a passing reference.

(a) The groups have targeted 63 hospitals, 471 health centres and 412 ambulances. The National Hospital in Homs has been completely destroyed.

(b) Persons involved in child vaccination campaigns have been targeted. One such attack took place in December 2013 in the suburbs of Hamah. One volunteer, a university student, has been abducted and his fate remains unknown.

(c) Numerous rumours have been circulated for political purposes in order to exploit children and encourage parents to refrain from having their children vaccinated. Moreover, studies conducted by the World Health Organization have shown that the strain of polio that has recently appeared in Syria originated in Pakistan, which is home to many of the armed men.

(d) Entire medical teams have been killed at many hospitals, health centres and emergency facilities. A total of 240 medical staff members have lost their lives. Most recently, doctors and nurses were killed at Dayr Atiyah Hospital, and a vaccination nurse was killed in the centre of the industrial district of Adra al-Balad.

V. Recruitment of children

Syria has enacted a stringent new law against child recruitment, which exonerates nobody on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. The competent officials have made that point to the Special Representative in the past. It should also be noted that the term "*shabbihah* militias" was invented for political purposes and has no basis on the ground.

VI. Denial of humanitarian access

The statement that the Syrian authorities have impeded humanitarian access is inaccurate and does not reflect the facts in any way. The Syrian Government has recently taken a set of new measures to facilitate humanitarian access across the Syrian Arab Republic. For instance, in November 2013 alone, the United Nations deployed 12 joint convoys to various regions that had not previously been accessible. A new mechanism has been put in place for granting authorizations. Another new mechanism grants authorization for convoys at United Nations warehouses. Innovative means have been found to transfer supplies from Iraq to the eastern regions of Syria across an air corridor put in place by the United Nations.

At the same time, however, the United Nations accounts for only 25 per cent of the total volume of assistance. The Syrian Government and non-governmental organizations are the main assistance providers. Some of the measures taken in order to ensure access to medical supplies are set out below:

1. Mobile clinics, such as one in Baba Amr, have been deployed to conflict zones and areas where health centres have been attacked by armed terrorist groups.

2. In cooperation with non-governmental organizations, including the Family Planning Association, mobile surgeries have been deployed to conflict zones in which health centres have been attacked.

3. State infrastructure has been used to open temporary health centres in conflict zones.

4. Conflict zones, including those controlled by armed terrorist groups, have been given medical equipment to promote child health, such as refrigerators, vaccines and medicine. Examples of such areas are Malikiyah and Mayadin in the East of the country and Bludan in Rif Dimashq.

5. Volunteers have been trained to provide health services to people in difficult areas.

6. Health workers' salaries have been paid, including in areas such as Raqqah that are controlled by armed terrorist groups.

Other violations

The report of the Special Representative fails to mention a significant number of crimes against children in Syria. Although not included in the six categories listed

above, those crimes do involve children's rights. For instance, the unilateral economic and financial sanctions have affected the living conditions of Syrians and the capacity of the State to provide the basic needs of Syrian children, particularly food and medicine.

Nor does the report refer to the devastating effect of terrorists and their obscurantist ideology on education. Teachers have been denied access to schools; fatwas have called for children to be sent to religious schools instead of formal schools; and the distribution of school books has been prevented. That situation has been exploited to recruit children for combat and numerous other activities in support of the terrorist groups, including services and sexual exploitation.

The Special Representative fails to mention the problems faced by Syrian children in refugee camps, such as poverty, lack of basic necessities and denial of access to schools. Girls are married in accordance with backward fatwas that legitimize arrangements, including "hidden marriage", which amount to child trafficking. Families are unable to provide for their children. The report does not address the deterioration of sanitary conditions for children in the camps, especially in winter. The recent spate of cold weather in the region has claimed the lives of several Syrian children in camps.

The report ignores the sale of children's organs in Turkish refugee camps, a problem that has existed since the outset of the crisis but has been neglected by the United Nations.

In any event, if the intention of the Special Representative was to focus on the six categories of violation, she should have done so throughout the report, instead of selectively including such topics as "Political and military developments", the causes of the crisis and other issues that have no direct bearing on the six categories of violation.

Conclusion

The Syrian Arab Republic calls on the Special Representative to review the erroneous and unsubstantiated information contained in the report. It urges her to refrain from using derogatory political terms and, instead, to refer to the numerous reliable documents provided by Syria, which are supported by medical reports and intelligence. At the very least, she should use the term "claims" to refer to accusations against the Syrian State, and set out the Syrian position regarding those claims, which she has been able to hear personally. In so doing, she could restore some balance to this extremely negative report, which came as a surprise to the Syrian Government. The Government had cooperated closely with the Special Representative, who visited the country twice and saw the realities on the ground.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic hopes that future reports of the Special Representative and her team will be more objective, enabling the Syrian Arab Republic to work with the United Nations offices on Syrian territory and with the Special Representative to improve the situation of children during this crisis.